



DATE: July 27, 2017

SUBJECT: The 10th Anniversary of the Passage of House Resolution 121: “To Restore the Dignity of WWII Sex Slaves”

MAIN POINTS:

- This event commemorated the 10th anniversary of the passage of House Resolution 121 in 2007, and honored those involved as well as victims who are still fighting for justice from the Japanese government.
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EVENT OVERVIEW

Date: July 27, 2017

Time: 11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Location: Rayburn House Office Building, Room 2044 45 Independence Ave SW, Washington DC 20515

ATTENDEES:

- **Aileen Chung**, Executive Secretary, Washington Coalition for Comfort Women Issues, Inc. (WCCW)
- **Christine Choi**, Chairman of the Board of Directors, WCCW
- **The Honorable Ed Royce**, Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Member of the US House of Representatives
- **The Honorable Mike Honda**, former Member of the US House of Representatives, 2001 to 2017
- **The Honorable Judy Chu**, Member of the US House of Representatives, 2009 to present
- **The Honorable Ileana Ros-Lehtinen**, former Chairwoman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Member of the US House of Representatives, 1989 to present
- **Dr. Ok Cha Soh**, 2nd term President, WCCW
- **Dr. Julie Jungsil Lee**, current President, WCCW

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- **Dongwoo Lee Hahm**, founding President, WCCW
- **Dennis Halpin**, Visiting Scholar, US-Korea Institute at SAIS (Johns Hopkins)
- **Mindy Kotler**, Director of Asia Policy Point
- **Young Cheon Kim**, President, Korean American Association of Washington Metropolitan Area

**The 10th Anniversary of the Passage of House Resolution 121:
“To Restore the Dignity of WWII Sex Slaves”**

Aileen Chung, Opening Remarks

Chung opened the event by giving an explanation of her organization, the Washington Coalition for Comfort Women Issues, Inc. (WCCW), who hosted this event. The WCCW is a non-profit organization fighting for the rights of wartime victims and their lawful reparations by raising public awareness and education. Today is a day, said Chung, to celebrate and reaffirm the passage of House Resolution 121 and to honor and recognize its contributors.

The Honorable Ed Royce

As co-author of House Resolution 121 ten years ago, Royce reflected on this and the “great victory” of the decision by the U.S. Supreme Court not to remove the Glendale Peace Memorial, which stands in commemoration of the Korean “comfort women” and what they went through. Ten years ago, when this bill came up, said Royce, a hearing was organized to allow these Korean women to speak about their personal experiences. Royce was deeply moved by their stories and said that the arguments these women made were so persuasive that the bill was passed unanimously by the House of Representatives. Royce thanked all organizations involved in this continuing effort to make sure that justice is done. His goal is to educate, across the United States, the next generation of Americans so they can really understand what happened during the occupation and the second World War.

As a longtime friend of the Korean-American community, Royce used to head the US-ROK Parliamentary Exchange before he became Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee. It is very important to Royce that the US Congress continues to speak out on injustice, and when Japan suggested these women were volunteers, he fought to immediately denounce this message in the most visible way possible. Royce carried, according to him, the unified message of all Korean-Americans and the opinion of the US Congress to Tokyo and demanded that the government of Japan disavow the statement made about “comfort women” in WWII. Royce made the observation that “it is much harder to get tomorrow right when we get yesterday wrong.” That is why he has spoken out on issues such as Dokdo Island, and that is why Royce

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will continue to press for Japan to recognize the atrocities that took place under their occupation and colonization of Korea. Royce gave thanks to family members who were part of that struggle and fought against fascism, whether it be imperial Japan or in Europe during WWII.

Christine Choi

After celebrating the auspicious occasion of the 10th anniversary of the passage of House Resolution 121 in 2007, Choi stated that the government of Japan has refused to officially acknowledge, accept responsibility for, and apologize to the victims. Choi expressed her desire to recognize and express her deepest respect and appreciation for former Congressman Mike Honda, who, as a leader and a champion, played an instrumental role in the passage of this resolution. Choi also recognized community leaders, scholars, and organizations here and abroad. Their education and tireless, restless efforts came together to allow the passage of this historic U.S. House Resolution 121. Choi expressed her hope and optimism that the government of Japan will finally recognize and take full responsibility for the historical truth of the “comfort women.” Together, said Choi, we can make this a reality.

The Honorable Mike Honda

Honda, one of the strongest allies of the “comfort women” issue, gave thanks to those involved in setting up this event, several on his staff for supporting him, and to the other representatives involved in the writing and passage of this resolution. He expressed sorrow at the death of Kim Kun-ja, one of the victims, and brought up the 1999 passage of a California resolution on Japanese war crimes. The US Congress has made an effort on behalf of three former colonies of Japan to break the silence and to lend a megaphone to and amplify the stories of those whose voices are not heard.

On the issue of the lawsuit against the Glendale Peace Memorial, Honda declared that as US citizens, we have the right to defend the human rights of those who have been injured. Beyond this, Honda regretted the fact that the government of Japan is supposed to be a partner of the US, but has tried to protest US textbook content on the issue. Honda warns everyone to be aware of forces that seek to interfere with the US historical record, and to push back. Worldwide, there are over 45 cities, ten in the US alone, that have established memorials to the victims. More are coming, said Honda, so “we must lend our support”; it has been ten years since the passage of this resolution, but we must remember that victims have suffered for over 70 years since the Japanese colonial era ended. Honda called for the government of Japan to issue an unambiguous apology and acceptance of historical responsibility. Time is short, said Honda, so the Japanese government should not be allowed to stall on this issue and we should always be ready to move this forward.

The Honorable Judy Chu

Chu remembered when she first heard of the “comfort women.” She was horrified at the stories of how girls as young as 14 or 15 years old were snatched from their daily lives and sent off to brothels to serve Japanese soldiers. Women at these “comfort stations” were forced into servitude, exploited as sex slaves, and for years had to endure this abuse. This was horrible for their livelihood, future, and bodies. It did not end with WWII, added Chu, because they then faced shame for decades, some even shunned by their families. To suggest that these victims did so on a voluntary basis is an absolute atrocity. As a woman herself, said Chu, she can feel only anguish at the thought that any other woman could face such a situation. Chu, who was not yet a Congresswoman at the time of the passage of House Resolution 121, expressed her deepest thanks and admiration to Congressman Honda for taking up the lead on this resolution to recognize the history of the “comfort women.” Congressman Honda, said Chu, did this at great sacrifice to himself as a Japanese-American. He took on the government of Japan, in the face of Japanese-Americans who did not support him in this effort, because he knew it was the right thing to do. This took a great deal of passion and courage.

It is critical for us to continue this work, said Chu, to continue this conversation, and to keep up the pressure on Japan because for over seven decades the Japanese have refused to acknowledge the pain that victims suffered. Like Honda, Chu emphasized that time is running out. For the last remaining 37 Korean survivors, Chu wants to make sure that they find peace. This is why Chu has joined other members of Congress to call upon Japanese leaders to formally acknowledge and truly apologize for past wrongs in forcing thousands of women into sex slavery during WWII. Prior to Prime Minister Abe’s joint address to Congress in 2015, Chu repeatedly called on Japan to acknowledge and apologize for this wrongdoing. It is clear that there is only one acceptable path forward, and that is to directly address this historical wrong by making sure that not only is this history recognized, but that it never happens again. Japan must make an effort to educate future generations in textbooks and classrooms about these crimes that Chu argued cannot just be attributed to the cost of war.

Chu thanked the WCCW for their two plus decades of pushing for international pressure, and encouraged those in the room to keep pushing forward and not to give up until they find justice for survivors.

The Honorable Ileana Ros-Lentinen

As a sponsor to House Resolution 121, Ros-Lentinen made a point to explain her use of the phrase “comfort women,” acknowledging that the term has been criticized by victims for not

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properly conveying the involuntary nature of their forced servitude and abuse, and explaining that her use is solely based on its association with this legislation. The correct term, agreed Ros-Lentinen, is “military sex slave,” and she asked for understanding when using the term “comfort women” in reference to the legislation. Following Chu, Ros-Lentinen gave thanks to Congressman Honda for spearheading the effort and communicating this issue to all of **their** colleagues. Ros-Lentinen also gave thanks to all the communities involved, such as the ones represented at the event. This resolution, said Ros-Lentinen, has raised a tremendous amount of awareness in Congress and around the world. Japan’s use of “comfort women” during WWII represents one of history’s most horrific examples of human rights abuses, and we should never stop educating and raising awareness. At its essence, the “comfort women” issue is about human rights, and the right of women all over the world, to live with dignity and honor. This issue is still very real today, and has not gone away. Ros-Lentinen said that the House Foreign Affairs Committee passed her North Korea Human Rights Act, which includes a provision to provide humanitarian assistance to the women of North Korea for victims of trafficking. The pain endures, and this problem continues as a modern-day equivalent of what went on during WWII. We continue to urge Japan to condemn all human trafficking, said Ros-Lentinen, both past and present.

Dr. Ok Cha Soh

Soh gave an acknowledgement of former Congressman Honda and what he accomplished on the “comfort women” issue during his tenure in Congress. She ended by saying, “we have a duty to stand up for those who cannot stand up on their own. We have a duty to speak for those who have no voices.” She then gave a summary of House Resolution 121.

Awards

Dr. Julie Jungsil Lee then awarded recognition to the following individuals: The Honorable Mike Honda, The Honorable Ed Royce, Ms. Dongwoo Lee Hahm, Dr. Ok Cha Soh, Mr. Dong-Suk Kim, Mr. Dennis Halpin, Ms. Mindy Kotler, Mr. Moon Hyung Rhee, Ms. Annabel Park, Ms. Phyllis Kim, Ms. Monica Jun, and Ms. Sinmin Pak.

Mindy Kotler

Kotler began by describing her background as a scholar of Asian history, Japanese history, and Japanese war crimes, before proceeding to confirm that the Japanese government and their Japanese right-wing supporters have unleashed a barrage of vitriol and fake history, fake news, and paid a number of people to distribute this news. The executive of the Japanese government - the cabinet, rather than the Prime Minister - needs to approve a statement or policy in order for it to be “official.” Since the war, there have been four cabinet-approved apologies – none of them

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directed toward “comfort women.” There have been several apologies on the issue of “comfort women,” but no official ones. Even apologies given by Prime Minister Abe were not official apologies on behalf of the Japanese government, since they were not cabinet-approved. What we are working for, said Kotler, is for the Japanese cabinet to approve a statement of apology. It will probably take a new government for this to happen because the current government has gone so far as to threaten to withdraw money from Japanese companies that do not support the official government stance on the “comfort women” issue. Those working on this issue around the world must be vigilant because they are always receiving death threats from Japanese supporters. Our work, said Kotler, is for all the women, girls, and boys who were made into sex slaves, from Australian nurses, Dutch mothers, Filipino girls. Kotler asked everyone involved to keep fighting.

Film trailer for 2016 documentary film *Apology*, directed by Tiffany Hsiung

Moment of silence for the passing of Kim Kun-ja, one of the “comfort women” who testified at the U.S. Congressional Hearing in 2007. Kim passed away on July 23, 2017 at the age of 91, bringing the number of known Korean survivors to 37. Kim, alongside other survivors, had criticized the 2015 bilateral agreement between Japan and South Korea, under which the two countries were to resolve the issue through Japanese funding of a South Korean foundation for the victims.

Congratulatory video for the 10th anniversary of the passage of House Resolution 121 by Lee Young-soo, a former “comfort woman” and Seoul-based activist. Alongside Kim Kun-ja, she testified at the U.S. Congressional Hearing on the issue in 2007.

Dr. Julie Jungsil Lee

Lee gave a presentation entitled, “Comfort Women Movement in the U.S.: Women’s Right against Wartime Activity.” She gave a definition of “comfort women”, explained the euphemistic term used by the Japanese military, and depicted the extent of this systematic, criminal, and government-sanctioned program of sex slavery. The correct term is “military sex slaves:” preferable over “comfort women,” as it does not objectify the victims as sexual tools but rather acknowledges their forced and unwilling participation. The first testimony came from the former “comfort woman” Kim Hak-soon, then 67, who came forward in August 1991 to share her story of abuse at the hands of the Japanese military. Her testimony engendered a groundswell of public support for the “comfort women,” and encouraged other victims to come forward as well, such as Geum-Joo Hwang, who was abducted at the age of 13, and Jan Ruff O’Herne, a Dutch occupant of Indonesia.

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The WCCW was founded in 1992 to advocate for the rights of these wartime victims and their lawful reparation. Their mission, which can be found at www.comfort-women.org, is to contribute to the eradication and prevention of sex crimes against women by promoting public awareness and education. The WCCW, Lee said, believes that the Japanese government must clearly acknowledge its responsibility in perpetrating the atrocity against these women, give an official apology, provide redress from government sources, and open all government records regarding its involvement. Until these steps are taken, the WCCW asserts that Japan should not be permitted a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council. Lee also added that The Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Sexual Slavery by Japan have protested every Wednesday outside the Japanese embassy in Seoul since 1992.

Lee presented a summary of the diversity dimensions and directions of the “comfort women” movement in the U.S., which includes grassroots movements, legislation, educational resources and publications, “comfort women” memorials, the production of art works, and archiving history through a Comfort Women Museum.

Dongwoo Lee Hahm

For the closing remarks, Hahm, who founded the WCCW in 1992, asked us to seek God’s blessings and to fight for the “comfort women.” She commemorated the passage of House Resolution 121 and expressed her deep appreciation for the representatives who were involved in the passage of this resolution.

Report by:

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